

# HOOKED NOW

DAVE SKIP RICK  
HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE



This is the last issue of HookedNow. We want to thank you for your support and interest over the past two and half years. We've received many positive comments which we greatly appreciate. We knew starting out this would be an experiment, and we thank you for sharing it with us! But HookedNow isn't disappearing completely. Stackpole Books has agreed to turn HookedNow into two books. Look for them in 2014!

Contact us at: [sweltsa@frontier.com](mailto:sweltsa@frontier.com) if you have any questions. *HAPPY CASTS*

In this issue we discuss fishing dry flies! The goal is often a drag-free float, and Dave describes the various ways to achieve one. Skip provides his special insight about how to fish dry flies. Finally, Rick gives a run down on how dry fly tactics differ between the major groups of aquatic insects and terrestrials. Enjoy, and may dry flies never be a drag on your fishing.

Contents this issue:

Skip Morris - *Fast Water, Creeks, and Dry Flies*  
Dave Hughes - *Achieving a Drag-Free Float*  
Rick Hafele - *Bugs & Dry Flies*

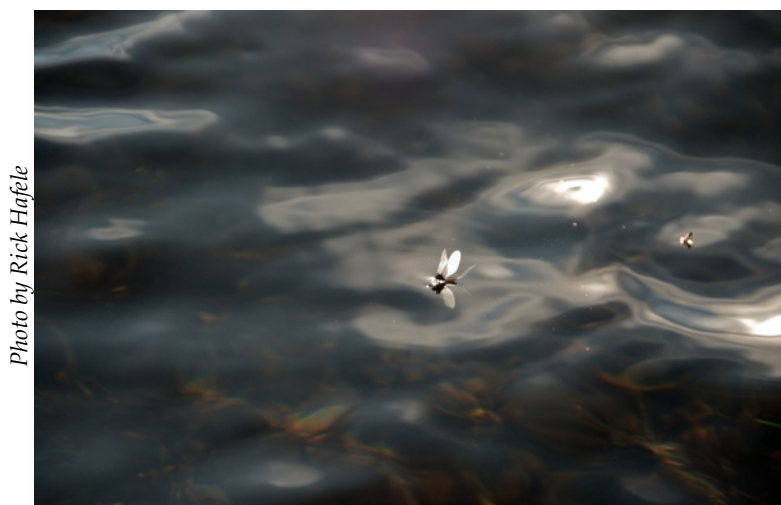


Photo by Rick Hafele



© 2013 by HookedNow.

All rights reserved. Reproduction or reuse of any materials (including sharing of electronic files) is prohibited without the expressed permission of the publisher.

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## SKIP MORRIS – FAST WATER, CREEKS, AND DRY FLIES

(All photos by Skip Morris except where noted)

Photo by Carol Ann Morris



If you're going to catch river trout consistently on dry-flies and floating emerger-flies, you need a solid understanding of some key elements: how to produce a natural drag-free drift of the fly, how to identify the insect of the moment and select a good fly to match it, and more. Dave and Rick have provided you with such standard but invaluable information and, as usual, have made it all concise. So I'll tackle a couple of lesser dry-fly and floating-emerger issues that thread consistently through my own fishing seasons: specifically, fishing these flies on quick and often choppy currents, and fishing them on small water. It's likely that one or the other, or both, thread through your seasons too, or will at some point.

On a whim, I'll start with small-water which, to me, means a creek. Yes, the terms "brook" and "stream" (and even "burn" in some places) can apply to small flows. But I grew up calling everything smaller than a river a creek, so "creek" it is.

First, you need to know that creeks come in many forms. There are lazy meadow creeks, bouncing mountain creeks, creeks that emerge as springs from underground water tables to run nearly a constant height and temperature the year round. Creeks also range in size, from so small you can step across them to broad enough that you'll have to work even a couple of dozen feet of fly line out of your rod to drop your fly on the other side--but any bigger than that and you've really got a small river in my opinion, regardless of whether someone saw fit to name the water with the word "creek." The people who long ago named our waters weren't all good judges of size or good grammarians.

So if you fish two streams named "creek" in a day and find the first one tiny and slow and the second white and wild and carrying four times the volume of the first, well, that's how it goes with creeks.

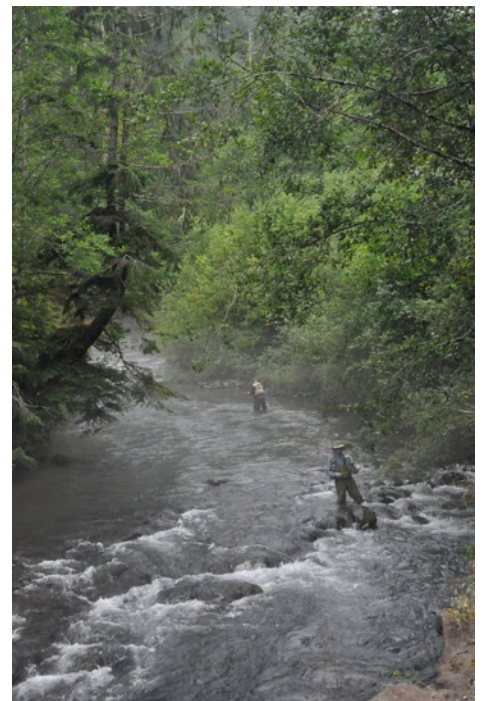


Photo by Carol Ann Morris

*One man's (or woman's) creek is another's river. This water could be either.*



Photo by Carol Ann Morris

## CASTING ON CREEKS

On most creeks, the first hurdle is getting the fly to the fish rather than getting it tangled in a tree or a shrub or high grass--creeks are often hemmed in by foliage. Creeks are usually too small to offer spacious obstacle-free gravel bars even in low water; as a source of water for trees and brush, creeks will tend to wind through an abundance of both, even if the ground forty feet back from the banks is bare.



*Creeks are often lined with trees and brush and if so, putting the fly in front of the trout may cal for...odd...measures.*

So the first move you should probably make each time you encounter new water on most creeks is to stop, look all around, and then decide how you're going to deliver the fly. If a conventional cast is in order, pick a clear space for your back cast and then put your line there accurately or else you'll have to stop and unhook it...if you can reach the fly. If there's nowhere to send your back cast, or just because it's a better solution under the circumstances, you can roll cast. But even roll casts can catch on low branches and such. So if roll casting is out too, there's "dapping," simply lowering the fly to the water with

perhaps as little as a couple of feet of tippet out the tip guide.

Photo by Carol Ann Morris



*Dapping is often the creek fisher's salvation.*

Dapping is underrated in my opinion, but that's changing with the popularity of tenkara fishing--an updated version of a traditional Japanese form of fly fishing. Tenkara rods are long, whippy, and lightweight, with no reel--just a fine supple line attached to the tip of the rod-shaft. You do some short casting, but a lot of tenkara fishing is, in my experience, dapping. So what?--dapping works.

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

With a conventional fly rod you can flick the fly out--a sort of ultra-abbreviated cast--even when the fly is pulled up close to the rod-tip for dapping. So, you can do some tenkara work without a tenkara rod.

The bow-and-arrow cast--an excellent way for a careless angler to stab a thumb--is handy on creeks. You hold the fly by its bend--only by its bend, behind its point--with the rod bent under *light* tension (with the rod-tip bent back towards its butt the tip can be easily broken), aim, let go. The line, leader, tippet, and fly sail straight out. It works, for close-in deliveries of the fly.

The problem with the roll cast, bow-and-arrow cast, and dapping is that they do little to help snap the moisture from a dry fly. So when you use these casts you'll probably have to dry the fly by hand, that is, squeeze the sodden fly in cloth (your shirt, a patch of cotton fabric...), apply more floatant, and repeat this process as needed. Or, if you can find some clear space in which to just flick the line back and forth quickly, you can dry the fly that way, and then deliver it in whatever manner is needed.

No fishing I know will sharpen your sense of where your casting strokes go than creek fishing. Fish creeks much and you'll become a master at avoiding snags with streamside obstacles--you'll have to.

*Photo by Carol Ann Morris*



*Don't expect to catch big trout from creeks (even though it can happen), but do expect healthy, vigorous, and handsome wild fish.*



## THE RIGHT DRY FLY OR EMERGER

Most creeks, in my experience, are home to small trout that struggle to find a meal and therefore can't afford to hesitate when one comes along. There are exceptions, to be sure, especially creek-size spring creeks and unusually rich creeks, both of which provide plenty to eat therefore allowing their trout to take only what they like and ignore the rest. But on the whole, creeks are more about the angler getting a fly in front of a fish while remaining undetected than about which fly that is. I've fished creeks all over the West, from Arizona to Colorado to Idaho to British Columbia and on them I've rarely had to play the elegant game of insect identification and imitation. Yes, sometimes I catch more fish in creeks when I match what's hatching, but even then I can usually put on something entirely unlike the prevailing natural and catch plenty of trout. That's fine with me--much as I love the challenge of trying to fool overfed trout who've learned to identify and ignore an artificial fly, I also enjoy the pleasant break enthusiastic creek trout provide.

There are, as with all fishing, exceptions. When speaking at fly-fishing events, I love telling how on an Oregon creek I once encountered a hatch of huge Salmonfly

stoneflies and found the little cutthroat trout interested in nothing smaller than a fly on a size 8 2X long hook. I've seen creek trout focused on Blue Winged-Olive mayflies, caddis, and more. Uncommon as this discriminating sort of feeding is on creeks, I know to bring some standard imitative dries and emergers whenever I go creek fishing. I also know to bring floating beetle imitations--according to Rick Hafele, who understands entomology at a level I can't imagine, most creek trout eat lots of beetles all season long.



*Beetle patterns work far more often than you might expect. Always carry a few and try one the next time you wonder what fly to use.*

On your standard creek, that's pretty much the story with dry-fly and floating-emerger fishing--cast or dap with care and thought; avoid detection by the fish; and you're free to choose about any reasonable fly most of the time, be it Royal Coachman, Parachute Adams, or whatever, and hook trout.

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## FAST WATER

On to my second assignment: a close look at fishing dry flies and emergers on larger streams and on rivers. The primary objective there: keep the dry fly, or floating emerger, afloat. Sometimes quick currents are smooth, and on such currents maintaining a floating fly isn't a problem; but there is another problem: quick, smooth currents don't hold many trout--fighting vigorous and relentless flows doesn't interest them. It's those fast currents that break and tumble that hold the most trout--the boulders that stand against the current, make it boil and churn white, also create soft places that make comfortable trout lies. But keeping a fly afloat in the chaos requires some strategy.

*Photo by Rick Hafele*



*Though this may look like unproductive water, the boulders break up the current creating plenty of slow-water pockets for trout.*

## FLOATANTS

For starters, bring floatant and use it. A powdery desiccant floatant will float a fly higher than paste and more stubbornly...at least for a while. Paste may not hoist the fly as high as desiccant, but it seems to keep working long after desiccant is done. My preference is to start with paste, snap-cast most of the moisture from a sodden fly, squeeze out more dampness with cloth (as I described earlier), and shake the fly in desiccant. The film of paste in the fly really seems to grip the powder and make the fly float especially high and long.



*A paste floatant on the left, a desiccant on the right. Each works, each has believers. The author typically uses both.*

If you're a desiccant purist, you still may want to bring a paste floatant to choppy rivers because smearing floatant up the tippet is another solid strategy for keeping a fly afloat.



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

There are now floatants that blend paste with desiccant. Interesting...but I've yet to test them.

## FLIES

Of course, no floatant is going to hold a fly with little inherent buoyancy afloat on rough water. So, it just makes sense to go with flies packed with plenty of lightweight water-resistant materials. I think first of the Humpy with its hair wings and tail and hump in its assortment of colors from yellow to red to lime green and more, and the Wulff series with its buoyant hair wings and tails. But we now have foam flies, some of which are capable of popping back up on top after a complete dunking. I wrote a book on tying foam flies (titled, in fact, *Tying Foam Flies*), so I can tell you with confidence that most such flies settle into the water some rather than dancing atop it on their toes like a Wulff. The payoff with a fly that carries plenty of closed-cell foam is that it may float all day long, fish after fish. Some foam flies include such buoyant natural materials as elk hair. Nearly all natural materials, elk included, eventually absorb water. So flies of foam and hair may float higher than flies made up almost entirely of foam, but they'll likely not float as long. When I think of flies that are mainly composed of foam, I think of all those odd Chernobyl Ants and my own Super Predator, though there are others. When I think of hybrid flies of foam and natural materials, I think of the Bunse Dun--a foam body but with a fan of hair to suggest both wings and legs, and the Rogue Foam Stones with their foam bodies and bullet heads of hair.

*Photo by Carol Ann Morris*



*Large, heavy rivers bursting white require buoyant flies--if those flies are going to stay on top--and special techniques and tackle.*

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

Emerger flies that ride half-sunken are typically tougher to keep afloat than full-floating dry flies for the obvious reason that they start out half sunken, and that's as true in wild water as in calm. But such emergers offer advantages: they display their abdomens below the mirrored surface of the water to signal and attract the trout, additionally, trout know that insects wriggling from their shucks are easy prey and prefer them often to fully hatched adults that can rise safely away at the last moment on their fresh new wings. So if



the currents are heavy and an emerger-fly is right, just do everything I've described already: rub a paste floatant into the fly and along the tippet, add desiccant to the fly later; squeeze the fly dry often and then reapply floatant; and prefer fly designs that want to stay afloat (the Brooks's Sprout and my own Morris Emerger are examples of emerger flies that ride half-sunken but float well). Also, pop the fly dry often as I'll describe next.

## CASTING

Dry-fly casting is typically about throwing narrow loops in the line, for three reasons: 1. narrow loops whip the fly around with a crisp snap at the end of a casting stroke which tends to throw off moisture; 2. narrow loops are the most efficient way to cast, requiring the least possible effort on the caster's part, and 3. dry flies and unweighted emerger-flies are lightweight enough to smoothly follow the line, leader, and tippet no matter how they're cast, making tight line-loops practical--try jerking a weighted nymph and strike indicator around at the end of a narrow dry-fly cast some time and you'll see why tight-loop casts are often called "dry-fly" casts. I'll save you the trouble of conducting the experiment: all that weight will bounce every which way likely creating an intricate snarl of tippet and leader and possibly line that might appear ornate, even artful to the non-fly fisher, but which you'll curse as you pick or chop it apart.

An alternate to drying flies on casts is to make short flicks of the rod, each sharp flick followed with a lazy stroke, with only a few feet of line off the tip. Timed right, this can really snap a fly dry. Be careful though--you can pop the fly right off the tippet if you overdo it.



One last issue: finding your fly out in the chaos. Practice is an obvious solution--the more time you spend trying to spot a dry fly on the water the better you'll get at it. But your best insurance that you'll see your fly, and therefore set the hook when a fish comes up to it, is to fish flies that are easy to see. Many dry flies and floating emergers have high pale wings; take the Royal Wulff--its bushy white hair wings signal the fly fisher. Some even have what might be called indicators; Dave Whitlock's Whit Hopper carries a short bunch of bright-orange deer hair on its back and my Woolly Wing holds a half-sphere of brightly colored wool or egg-yarn atop its hackle. The Overley's Spotlight Emerger catches the angler's eye with a single white upright wing and the Brooks's Sprout, also an emerger-fly that rides half-sunken, displays the top of the white foam dowel used as the core for its parachute hackles. All these emergers are among the many that are easy for the eye to find on water.

## FLY PATTERNS

### FOAM BEETLE

**HOOK:** Light wire, standard length or 1X long (standard dry-fly hook), sizes 18 to 8.

**THREAD:** Black 8/0 or 6/0.

**BODY and HEAD:** A strip of buoyant black closed-cell foam.

**LEGS:** A few black elk or moose-body hairs bound crossways and trimmed (or fine black rubber-strand).

**COMMENTS:** Many tiers add a strike indicator of yellow poly yarn or egg yarn (or another bright color), bound with the thread-collar holding the foam, pulled up and trimmed fairly short.



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## WHIT HOPPER

Dave Whitlock

**HOOK:** Standard to heavy wire, 3X long, sizes 12 to 6.

**THREAD:** Tan or yellow 3/0.

**ANTENNA:** Stripped hackle-stems, colored with a brown marking pen. (I normally skip the antennae.)

**BODY:** Dyed-yellow elk or deer hair, bound on well up the shank, spiraled with the working thread down and up the hair in a crisscrossed pattern. Trim off the butts.

**WING:** A section of mottled turkey quill toughened with Dave's Flexament (or an artists' fixative) trimmed round on the end. Under the wing, pale-yellow deer hair.

**HOPPING LEGS:** Knotted pheasant-tail fibers or trimmed and knotted big yellow grizzly hackles.

**BULLET HEAD and HAIR COLLAR:** Natural tan-brown elk hair on top, pale-yellow elk hair underneath.

**STRIKE INDICATOR:** Orange deer hair bound atop the thread-collar to flare, and then pulled up and trimmed to leave a half-sphere.



## BROOKS'S SPROUT, FLAVILINEA

Bob Brooks

**HOOK:** Light wire, humped shank (pupa/emergent hook), sizes 16 to 10.

**THREAD:** Olive 8/0 or 6/0.

**PARACHUTE WING:** A section of a white foam dowel.

**PARACHUTE HACKLE:** Grizzly-dyed-yellow.

**SHUCK:** Brown Antron over a few mallard wood-duck fibers.

**ABDOMEN:** Darkish-olive turkey or goose biot.

**THORAX:** Darkish-olive buoyant natural or synthetic dubbing.

**COMMENTS:** *Flavilinea*, or the "Lesser Green Drake," is a substantial mayfly that hatches from moderate to swift currents on western rivers.





# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## DAVE HUGHES – ACHIEVING A DRAG-FREE FLOAT

(All photos by Dave Hughes except where noted)



Photo by Rick Hafele

I fished a headwater cutthroat stream once with an experienced steelhead fisherman. If you wanted one of those large fish caught, he's the one you'd want to catch it...you wouldn't want to depend on me. He's focused on fishing for steelhead with flies for many years; I've done it casually. But I've fished for wild cutts all my life.

Because I was hosting, I followed along politely, gave him all the best water, kept out of his backcast area, and watched while he fished. I was a bit surprised to see that he animated his dry fly, the same Elk Hair Caddis I had tied to my own tippet, the second it landed on the water. Apparently based on his long experience with steelhead, my friend would tug his fly a foot or so, then let it drift the same foot or so, then scoot it again. I could easily understand it. The motion looked like it was designed to coax the fish, and it looked like it ought to do just that.

His casts were upstream to what I considered to be the precise right holding lies, either on the current tongues that fed into the small-stream pools, or just at the downstream ends of those tongues, where the busy entering flow lost its force over the depths of the pool, and at least in theory dropped all its groceries to trout waiting down below. He fished his dry fly right where I'd have fished mine.

I was even more surprised at the reaction of the trout to that movement of the dry fly. He cast that 'worked' dry over several pools without ever getting even a hint of a strike. I did see the boil of a trout that came up to have a look, didn't like what it saw, turned tail and dashed back to the bottom. Other than that, nothing, not even a swat from a tiddler. These were not precisely what we think of as *smart* fish. We were so far into the forested upper end of the stream that few folks ever went there. A waterfall downstream blocked migrations of anadromous fish. There was nothing up where we were but wild resident cutts...a twelve-incher would be a big one.

This would not have amounted to an experiment, and we'd have never known if it was just some quirk of the winds or weathers or those trout on that day, except that I dropped behind my friend, waited a scant few minutes for the trout to settle, then cast to the same places, with the same fly but without the movement, and caught the normal complement of trout I would expect. I finally caught up and explained that in my

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

Photo by Rick Hafele



*Small-stream trout like to sit where quick currents enter pools. But you may find they reject your dry flies if you don't get a good drag-free float.*

experience, cutts didn't like to see their dry flies moving. On the next cast to the water he was already fishing, the steelhead expert, no stranger to the drag-free drift with Bombers and such big things, set his dry onto the water, let it plot its own course, and instantly hooked his first trout of the day.

Those were unsophisticated fish in the extreme. If they were that bashful about drag on a dry fly, it's not difficult to imagine that trout in streams that are pestered modestly, or even heavily, would be

much more frightened by it. But it's wise to pause at this point, and note that the reasons trout are hesitant to take dragging dry flies are not necessarily all rooted in fishing pressure. It's just that nature presents most, though not all, floating insects to trout without any movement contrary to the current. That's what they're used to seeing, and that's what they're accustomed to eating. If something acts in a different fashion, it's not likely that they connect a bunch of dots, say to themselves, "Aha, that thing has drag, and therefore it's attached to a leader and then a fly line, and that means it's a dry fly with a hook in it, cast by some nasty guy out to catch me and toss me into a frying pan!" More likely, the trout just fails to compute that it's a natural insect, something it's used to eating, and either refuses to move toward it at all, or rises up toward it suspiciously, but turns away from it when it moves.

If your goal is to achieve a drag-free drift for your dry fly, which it should be most of the times you fish one, then it's best to be able to solve the problem no matter which direction the trout lies relative to your own position on the water...we're discussing moving water here, creeks, streams, and rivers, on the assumption that you won't find it difficult to get a drag-free drift when fishing a lake or a pond. At times, even on still waters, you'll have to calculate for the wind, which you do by casting into it, which in turn causes your fly to be pushed toward you. This introduces some slight slack in your leader, which you need to address by drawing it out slowly as the fly moves toward you. Those are pretty easy problems to solve, and the truth is, when wind tosses up waves on a lake, trout aren't often bothered by drag unless your fly leaves a wake.



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

They'll be bothered by it on a stream, even on a tossed riffle, so you always need to take it into your calculations. The best approach to solving it is to consider that the trout you're after, whether it's been spotted rising or is holding and not visible on a suspected lie, is at the center of an imaginary circle that you draw around it. Your position is at some point around that circle, either downstream, across-stream, or upstream from the trout, or the trout's assumed lie.

If your approach and position are downstream from the trout, then your cast will be upstream, into the current. Your fly will immediately

begin drifting back downstream toward you. It's the easiest position from which to execute a drag-free drift. All you need do is gather slack as it's introduced by the progress of the fly toward you. A cast directly upstream has a large disadvantage attached: it throws your leader and fly right over the head of the trout you're after, lays it on the water right on top of it, then lets it all drift back downstream right in its sight. If the water is rough, this is not a big problem, though as you can imagine, it can be alarming to a trout even in a riffle if it has had this very thing happen over its head a lot. But even wild trout can be skittish about things flying overhead. It brings back memories of kingfishers in small trout and osprey in those of medium to large size. None of them like to be reminded about those dangers.

There are three small rules about the direct upstream cast. 1. Avoid it if you can by moving off a few degrees to one side or the other. 2. Avoid using it on any water that is not wrinkled on top--if the water is a smooth run or flat, forget the direct upstream cast except in the following case. 3. If you must make a cast straight upstream to a rising trout or known lie, then place the fly gently onto the water a foot or at most two upstream from the trout or its position. Hit it almost on the nose. Let it see nothing more than your fine tippet, and that only briefly. You'll get a short drag-free drift, and the fish might not notice anything wrong about it. Cast four or five feet upstream in such a situation, and you'll rarely see anything but the wake of the departing fish.



*When you spot a trout, or the suspected lie of one, then imagine it to be at the center of a circle, with your casting positions on various points of that circle around it. Your ability to get a drag-free drift over the trout depends on your ability to make different presentations, depending on your position around that imaginary circle.*

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE



*When you're dealing with a rising trout, it's critical not only to get a drag-free float, but also to show the fly to the trout ahead of the line and leader, which might frighten it.*

In almost all cases, a downstream position that is sufficiently to one side or other will place your fly on the water without showing your leader or line to the trout. You'll still get that drag-free drift that is always your goal. You'll do better, even with this cast off at an angle, on water that is at least slightly disturbed, a riffle or run. If it's smooth, then consider it beneficial to make another move around that imaginary circle, and take a position either directly off to one side or the other, or at a slight angle upstream or down from that 90-degree position. Now you'll need to learn to execute a reach cast to achieve a drag-free float.

The reach cast is a bit complicated in description, but much more simple in execution. First, you lay your rod over to the upstream side, and work out the right amount of line to reach the trout, or its lie, without ever making forecasts in the sight of the trout. Then you lift up your delivery stroke, aim it three to five feet upstream from the fish, make your forecast stroke, then tip your rod over, upstream, while the line loop unfurls and delivers the fly to the water just where you want it. The result: your line cuts across the current between your rod tip and the trout at a fairly abrupt angle, and your rod is held not far above the water on the upstream side.

Now it's simply a matter of following the drift of the fly with your rod tip. As the fly floats downstream, you bring the rod tip along with it. This allows the upstream angle of the line and leader to slowly drop downstream with the fly, giving it that sought free drift for the needed number of feet.

The reach cast can be especially effective when you're casting to one rising trout in a pod of them. If the targeted trout refuses the fly, just continue

The reach cast is a bit complicated in



*If you have a lot of conflicting currents between your position and that of a rising trout, a reach cast will let you cast across them without getting instant drag.*



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE



*On the rough water of riffles, it's usually fine to cast upstream, though you'll always do better if you get off to one side or the other at least a bit, so your line and leader do not fly through the air right over the heads of the fish.*



*On smooth water, an upstream cast is certain to frighten fish. Instead, make the first part of the reach cast, which is to aim your cast a few feet upstream from the rising trout; while your line loop unfurls, lay your rod over upstream, and you'll end with the line at an angle down toward the fly.*

following it with the rod tip, and it will drift on through the pod. You can follow the fly through its position directly across from you, with the rod pointed exactly at it, and even continue downstream, so long as the currents between you and the fly allow the line and leader to remain somewhat slack. At times, by angling your rod far downstream, ending up at the angle that is opposite the one when the cast landed, you can get a ten-, fifteen-, or even twenty-foot drag-free drift. In a large pod of trout, that might mean showing your dry fly to five or six of them rather than the single one you've targeted. If one of them has a different opinion about your fly than the others, or if the others have just fed but a stray one is just in the mind to tip up and take something when your fly drifts over its head, then you're in some business that you might have missed without using the reach cast.

The good thing about the reach cast is that it shows the fly at the distal end of your line and leader. They never fly over the head of the trout on the cast, and they never float directly over it on the float. You can repeat the cast over and over, waiting for things to become precisely right out there, without putting the trout down...unless you get drag.

It's a well-known law of dry fly fishing that once a trout has seen your fly go over it with drag on its tail, that trout will be forever suspicious of that fly. You can cast and cast from then to forever, and you'll not catch that trout until you change out that fly. That's the reason that the first cast to any fish, the first drift of a dry fly over it, is the single most important one...do your best to execute your first cast perfectly, knowing that it has the potential to spoil all those that come after it.

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

If you're not able to move into position for a reach cast, or if the reach fails to deliver the fly on a drag-free drift because intervening currents cause drag no matter how much you reach, then you'll need to take up the last position on that imaginary circle around the trout, upstream from it, and present the fly with a downstream wiggle cast.

Just as you should avoid casting to a trout from directly downstream, you should almost never cast to one from directly upstream. The reason is fairly simple: if it refuses on the first cast, you'll have to pick the fly off the water right over its head, and that is a



*Smooth currents, whether on larger river flats or little spring creeks, require downstream drag-free drifts more often than not. If you cast over the heads of trout in clear water such as this, they're almost certain to think they're being attacked by birds, and pull the blankets over their heads.*

prescription for disaster. Always move off to one side, and make your presentations at an angle from 30- to about 60-degrees downstream. Then if the trout refuses, which will often be the case, you can simply tip your rod over to the side, let the current lead the line and leader and finally fly out of sight of the trout, and make your pickup when they're all well away, where they won't disturb the trout.

To execute the downstream wiggle cast, as with the reach, make your measuring forecasts well away from the trout, so it will not see anything flying through the air over its head. You'll need a few more feet of line out than the distance between you and the trout, to compensate for the wiggle you're about to install in the line. On the final presentation, aim the cast so the fly will land two to four feet upstream from the trout. As the line loop unfurls, wobble the rod tip back and forth gently. This will cause the line to



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

*Photo by Rick Hafele*



form S-curves in the air, and to land on the water with somewhat of the swimming posture of a snake. The leader will have slack in it as well, and it is the uncoiling of these curves in the line and leader that allow the fly to float naturally downstream, free from drag.

This cast has the advantage of putting the fly at the point, floating ahead of the line and leader. The first thing the trout is able to notice is the fly arriving into its

window of vision on the outside world. If it's able to resist on the first cast, you can make many more without alarming the fish, so long as you lead the line and leader away from the trout before making a pickup. Of course, if you rip the fly off the water, the trout will be long gone.

There are a few other ways to present dry flies with drag-free drifts from various points around that imaginary circle surrounding the trout. However, these are the big three--up and across stream, cross stream reach, downstream wiggle--and you should master all if you'd like to be a versatile dry fly angler. Once you've mastered them, then you can begin to combine them. If you add a bit of wiggle, for example, to a cross stream reach cast, then you'll further increase the freedom with which the fly floats, thereby up the odds that a trout will approve your presentation.

The same can even be said of the upstream cast. If you're on water with any conflicting currents at all, adding some slack to your line and leader, even if you're on a riffle and casting at an angle up into the current, you'll get a better drift, and therefore have a higher chance to catch a trout, than you will if you cast with an arrow-straight line and leader.

###

*Photo by Rick Hafele*



Dave's book *Trout Flies* is a full-sized reference manual to all the sorts of flies you'll ever need to catch trout, including dries and emergers, those most demanding of drag-free drifts.



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## RICK HAFELE – BUGS & DRY FLIES

*All photos by Rick Hafele except where noted*



*Photo by Dave Hughes*

A number of factors need to be considered when choosing a dry fly and deciding how to fish it.

1) Water type: Whether the water is fast and rough or slow and smooth or somewhere in between will be a big factor in choosing a dry fly pattern style. Clearly when the water is fast and rough you need a dry fly style that emphasizes floatation over exact imitation. Not that you can completely ignore what trout may be eating, but in fast rough water trout have much less time to scrutinize the look of the fly, so getting it to float well and drift naturally are top priorities. Likewise on smooth, slow waters trout have ample time to look your fly over before deciding if it's a fake or not. In this case a more imitative fly, along with a good presentation and natural drift, become crucial.



*Photo by Dave Hughes*



*The water above left will require very different dry fly pattern styles than the water on the right, even if you are imitating the same insect.*

2) Rise form: When trout are rising and you are deciding what fly to put on, spend some time studying their rise form first. Is it a splashy aggressive rise? A rise where the nose breaks the surface but no bubble is left behind? Maybe a rise where the dorsal or caudal fin disturbs the surface but not the nose or head? Or does the trout leave a nice obvious ring on the surface with a bubble in the middle? These are important clues to where and what the fish are eating and should be carefully considered when choosing a pattern. A splashy

rise often indicates an active insect, like a caddis pupa or adult, and tells you you can fish your fly with some action rather than just dead drift. When a nose breaks the surface but no bubble is left behind, think emerger pattern floating flush in the surface film. This occurs frequently during mayfly hatches. If just a dorsal or caudal fin is disturbing the surface you should plan to present a fly an inch or two below the surface

rather than on top of it. Try a little nymph tied on dropper off the bend of a dry fly. The rise that leaves a ring on the surface with a bubble in the middle indicates the trout are taking a dead drifting fly floating on top of the surface. This is the right time to put on most standard dry fly patterns.



*A nice rise, but no bubble left behind on the surface. This indicates the trout took something just below or in the film and you should fish a fly that works accordingly.*

- 3) Food type: If trout are feeding at all selectively, which they do frequently when food is on the surface, you will need to know what they are eating to select an appropriate fly pattern. But knowing what the trout are eating will also help you understand how you should present your surface fly. So after considering water type and rise form, make sure you look carefully at what the trout are eating. Because food type influences your presentation, I'm going to spend the rest of this article discussing how different insect groups behave when they are on the surface and how that affects your pattern selection and presentation.

The key groups of insects I want to discuss here are mayflies, stoneflies, caddisflies, midges, and terrestrials. Given the relatively small amount of space to cover all these different insect groups, this discussion will provide the big picture, i.e. how things differ between these major groups rather than differences between specific species within each group. Fortunately there are many excellent books that cover different insect hatches in detail, some of which I have listed at the end of this article.



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## Mayflies

Mayflies live in all types of water in streams as well as lakes. Thus you will find them hatching in fast rough water, moderately fast water, slow flat water, and still water. This is one reason there are so many different styles of dry flies designed to imitate mayflies: some float well, some look realistic, and some try to do both. There are also two different winged mayfly stages that dry flies must imitate - duns and spinners. This adds another layer of pattern styles to the mix. Last, mayfly behavior during emergence involves the nymphs swimming up to the surface, then hanging briefly in the surface film while the dun stage pops out on top of the water. While this moment is brief - maybe 10 to 30 seconds once the nymph reaches the surface before the dun floats free from the nymphal shuck on top - trout often focus their attention on the nymphs in the film or the duns in the process of escaping the nymphal shuck. This means a variety of floating nymphs and emerging dun patterns can come into play during mayfly hatches.



*The two winged stages of mayflies (dun - left; spinner - right) are both important to imitate with dry flies, and each requires its own style of fly pattern.*

Ninety percent of the time when imitating mayflies on or in the surface you will want to present your dries and emergers with a drag free presentation (see Dave's article for details). Duns can't move on the surface while struggling to escape their nymph's exoskeleton. Then once free from the nymph, duns on the surface float quietly until their wings dry and they can take off. This again involves little to no movement on the water. And in their final stage, when spinners return to deposit their eggs on the water's surface, spinners die on the water and float motionless wings flat on the surface. All of this adds up to trout that want a fly drifting without drag. Even the slightest hint of unnatural movement can quickly change the mind of a trout about to take your fly. So read Dave's article and perfect your skills for drag-free presentation.

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

But trout are fickle, unpredictable creatures, and when you least expect it they can respond completely opposite of what you'd expect. A perfect example came on a trout stream I try to fish every summer with Poul Bech, a longtime fishing buddy from Vancouver, Canada. This stream is like many mountain streams, it comes rushing down steep slopes, cold with snowmelt well into July. By August high water has receded and in its flatter reaches there are nice long runs separated by short riffles and deep pools. Trout love this kind of stream and so do mayflies. On typical day you can run into three or four different mayfly species emerging, each at their own time of day, and each causing trout to respond with either indifference or excitement. On one particularly good trip two years ago a little size 14 tan mayfly (a *Rhithrogena* species) came off with exceptional reliability every afternoon. After two days we had this hatch and fish dialed in: A size 14 tan Compara-dun or Harrop dun cast above a rising trout and allowed to float dead-drift over their feeding position was about as sure to get a rise as you can get.



*When trout are taking mayfly duns off the surface you will almost always want to present your fly with a careful drag-free presentation.*

But on the third day something changed. My flies drifted perfectly over rise after rise without so much as a turned up nose or refusal swirl. I went to a smaller pattern - nothing. A larger pattern - zip. Then Poul walked up to the run I was fishing. Some of the trout I'd been pestering were still rising, so Poul threw out his fly. It was tied with oversize hackles on a short shank hook and floated like a feather to the water where it looked like a chunk of sock fuzz on the water. Then Poul gave it a good twitch, then another. A trout three feet away from the fly made a 90 degree turn and charged that fly like it was the last morsel in the stream, and smashed it right in front of us. After releasing a nice 14 inch rainbow, Poul repeated this act several more times in quick succession. So much for a nice drag free float! Poul was nice enough to pass me a similar fly and that



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

night we both tied more of them in camp. For the next three days of the trip that pattern twitched on the surface kept trout charging to it like they couldn't help themselves. My point here is that when the known methods don't work, try something completely different. In this case trout that ignored a traditional drag-free presentation, were suckers for a twitched fly, even though the duns on the water didn't twitch and skate on the surface. Go figure!



*Poul's oversize hackled dry fly twitched on the surface get's a splashy reaction from an otherwise picky trout.*



## Caddisflies

After mayflies, caddisflies produce some great surface feeding by trout and great dry fly action. And caddisflies are even more diverse as a group than mayflies, with species living in every type of freshwater habitat from fast water to lakes, so once again caddis dry fly patterns will vary depending on the type of water you are fishing as well as the specific caddis you are imitating.

A big difference between caddisflies and mayflies is their behavior. Rather than sitting quietly on the surface during emergence, caddis move, sometimes a lot. The first burst of movement occurs when caddis pupa leave their protective shelters on the stream or lake bottom and start swimming to the water's surface. Caddis pupae are excellent swimmers and they rise to surface with rapid jerky movements. Once at the surface caddis adults exit their pupal shuck very quickly, so in just a few seconds the adults

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

rapidly fly off the surface. Some species even skitter across the surface for several feet before taking to the air.



*Left: Caddis adults running around on streamside foliage provide a clear signal to put on a similar looking dry fly.*



*Right: A caddis pupa nearly ready to start swimming to the surface where the adult will quickly escape and fly off the water.*

All this movement means your presentation when imitating caddis with dry flies will often include movement. Thus, while twitching a mayfly dry is usually a mistake, twitching a caddis dry is frequently a good idea. Leonard M. Wright Jr. made this idea clear in his 1974 book, *Fishing the Dry Fly as a Living Insect*. The idea of moving your dry fly is thus not new and goes back much farther than Leonard M. Wright Jr.'s book as well, especially as it concerns caddisflies. Again go back and watch the rise forms. When the trout's rise is a vigorous splashy one, and caddis are on the water it generally means one of two things; either the trout are chasing pupae and taking them near the surface, which means you'd be wise to put on a pupa pattern, or trout are taking adults leaving the water or skittering across the surface. In this case fish a dry fly, but move it across the water.

The last important note about fishing caddis dry flies is that sometimes it's best to fish them wet instead of dry. The females of many caddis species lay their eggs by diving underwater and swimming to the stream or lake bottom, then once their eggs are



*The CDC & Elk is a simple but effective caddis pattern that can be fished dry on the surface or wet below it. Pattern from Tying Dry Flies, by Jay Nichols*



deposited they let go and swim back up to the surface. During this activity you will be more successful if your dry fly sinks several inches to a foot below the surface. Because dry flies like to float you will often need to add some split shot to your leader to get your fly deep enough. A simple wet fly swing is a good presentation to use in this situation.

## Midges

Some people use the name “midge” to refer to any very small insect, but technically a midge is a species in the family Chironomidae of the order Diptera. The shortened version of the family name, “chironomid,” is also used by anglers and is synonymous with midge. Whether you call them midges or chironomids, they are vastly more numerous and diverse than any other aquatic insect, with thousands of known species and many more yet to be discovered. Such diversity means you will find midge hatches any month of the year and in any type of water. They also vary widely in size and color, and though many are tiny, some midge pupae and adults reach lengths matched by size 10 or even 8 hooks. Fortunately all midges have a similar shape and overall appearance, so a few pattern styles tied in a wide range of sizes and colors usually suffices.



*These bright green midge pupae and tan caddis pupae we removed in almost equal numbers from a trout's stomach.*

Midge pupae swim up to the water's surface to emerge like caddisflies, but without the rapid swimming action of caddis pupae. Likewise adult midges, once free from the pupal shuck, typically drift quietly on the surface for some distance before flying away. The adults of some species do buzz across the surface and are referred to as *buzzers*.



*Midges are a staple in the diet of trout in all types of water, but they take on cult status in lakes. When trout take midges they often leave behind very little surface disturbance. A good indication they are feeding on pupae just below or in the surface film.*

During midge hatches it's the pupa stage most often taken by trout, so in most cases you will want to fish a pupa pattern. Fish feed on midge pupae anywhere from right off the stream or lake bottom, to hanging in the surface film. In lakes trout feed on pupa as much as 20 or 30 feet below the surface. Techniques for fishing pupa patterns deep in lakes has become a fine art on many productive trout lakes. But we're here to discuss dry flies not how to fish deep chironomid pupae.



*Over a thousand species of midges or chironomids live in freshwater, and anglers have come up with thousands of patterns to match them. Whatever patterns you choose you will need both pupa patterns (left) and surface patterns for adults (right). The huge range of colors and sizes of midges only adds to the number of patterns you need to carry to match them.*



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

The most common pattern used to imitate midge adults is the Griffith's Gnat, a very simple fly that seems to work most of the time as long as the size matches the natural's. Trout rising to midge adults on the surface leave very small dimples, and because midge adults can also be very small, the whole hatch can go unseen. I find a small pair of travel binoculars an essential part of my fishing gear. Just a few minutes looking at the water's surface through binoculars often reveals unseen food like little midges, mayfly spinners, ants, and more drifting along in the surface. I've also found that when midge adults are mixed in with larger food items trout frequently target the small midges leaving the more obvious morsels floating by untouched. Why? I don't know?



*Midges are important enough to deserve their own fly box - or two!*

In most cases a straightforward drag-free drift with an appropriate midge adult pattern produces good results. Because midge patterns will often be tiny (size 20's and less), your tippet will often be 6X or even 7X. And because the flies are so small they are easily moved by current drag on the leader and tippet. To minimize drag use a slightly longer tippet than usual, say four feet of 7X, and make a slack line cast so there are some wiggles and bends in the leader on the water. Occasionally, when adult midges are buzzing on the surface, try adding some movement to your fly. Setting the hook with such small flies and light tippets is nothing more than *tightening up* on a fish when it takes. If you strike hard be prepared to tie on another fly as the trout, with your fly in its lip, darts for cover.

## Stoneflies

As many species of stoneflies (order Plecoptera) live in cold trout streams as mayflies, but the frequency you will need to match them is much less, and the patterns and tactics for imitating them are simpler too. This is a result of their behavior.

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

First, nearly all stonefly species live in moderate to fast water (a few uncommon species manage to live in lakes), so most of the time you will be fishing in or near bouncy riffles and runs. Second, stonefly nymphs crawl out of the water when mature, and the adults emerge on dry land. Thus, fish have no opportunity to feed on them during adult emergence. After mating on streamside vegetation, females fly back to the water to lay their eggs, which provides the best opportunity for trout to eat them and for anglers to imitate them with dry flies. Because all stonefly adults have a similar shape, picking the right dry fly is a matter of selecting a fly of the right size and color. Since you often need to fish in choppy fast water, patterns that float well should be used. For large stoneflies - some of the largest aquatic insects in streams are stoneflies - patterns tied with foam bodies are often used.



*Above: The two modes of behavior of stonefly adults on the water: flying across the surface or sitting still on it. If your dry fly fished dead-drift is ignored then try adding some movement.*

*Left: Dry flies for stoneflies need to float well in rough water, thus they typically incorporate lots of hackle or foam bodies.*

Two presentation approaches will cover nearly all stonefly adult situations: one, a drag free drift, and two, adding twitches and movement to your fly. It can be difficult to tell at any given time which presentation trout will prefer, therefore, I usually start with a drag-free drift, and if that doesn't turn fish on then I start adding twitches and even some



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

skating action to my fly. Last, if you run into a heavy fall of egg laying adults and trout ignore your dry fly, try swinging a similar looking wetfly just under the surface.

## Terrestrials



*Deep water along a bank with overhanging vegetation is the perfect situation for trying an ant or beetle pattern.*

fly action. Even when there are no trout rising to the surface, floating a beetle or ant pattern under some overhanging vegetation or along a deep cut bank, can produce surprising results. And we all know the excitement grasshopper patterns can provide from mid to late summer on streams with grasslands nearby. Then of course there are inch worms and bees and wasps to consider as well. This is another case where my binoculars come in handy.

*Ant patterns should always find a place in your fly box, along with beetles and grasshoppers.*

*Small terrestrials, like ants and beetles, can be hard to see on the water's surface, so look carefully on streamside vegetation and use a set of binoculars to look for them on the water's surface.*



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

Presentation of terrestrials basically follows those described for stoneflies. First try a drag-free drift. If that doesn't work add some twitches. On streams bordered by a lot of overhanging trees, spiders end up in the surface in much greater numbers than you would expect. To take advantage of this try swinging a moderate to large soft hackle (size 12 or 10) pattern through choppy ripples and runs. This will sometimes turn a slow summer day into a fast one, and though it isn't exactly dry-fly fishing, the strikes will often be aggressive and leave just as large a splash on the surface and burn just as many memories into your mind's eye.

If you want to get more detailed info about specific hatches, and the patterns and tactics to match them, here are some books worth looking at. *Note: This is not intended to be a comprehensive list, but are books I find quite useful (and yes, I know some of the authors!).*

*Hatch Guide for New England Trout Streams*, by Thomas Ames, Jr., Amato Publications, 2000.

*Pocket Guide to Western Hatches*, by Dave Hughes, Stackpole Books, 2011.

*Western Mayfly Hatches*, by Rick Hafele & Dave Hughes, Amato Publications, 2004.

*Mayflies the Angler and the Trout*, by Fred Arbona, Jr., Winchester Press, 1980.

*Caddisflies: A Guide to Eastern Species for Angler's and Naturalists*, by Thomas Ames, Jr., Stackpole Books, 2009.

*Flies for Western Super Hatches*, by Jim Schollmeyer and Ted Leeson, Stackpole Books, 2011.

*The Art of Tying the Dry Fly*, by Skip Morris, Amato Publications, 1993.

*Trout Flies for Rivers*, by Carol Ann Morris and Skip Morris, Stackpole Books, 2009.

*Tying Dry Flies: How to Tie and Fish Must-have Trout Patterns*, by Jay Nichols, Stackpole Books, 2009.

*The Way of a Trout With a Fly - and Some Further Studies in Minor Tactics*, by G. E. M. Skues. First Edition 1921, but numerous editions have been published since. I list this book because it is one of my all time favorites. It contains many insightful ideas about trout and tactics, and worth reading once every year.



**THE END  
THANK YOU  
from Dave, Rick, & Skip!**



**To keep up with Dave, Skip, and Rick's latest publications, where they are speaking, or to book them for your own program , go to their personal websites at:**

Skip Morris: <http://www.skip-morris-fly-tying.com/>

Rick Hafele: <http://rickhafele.com>

Dave Hughes: <http://dave-hughes-fly-fishing.com/>